

Executive Summary  
of the  
1995 Archaeological Investigations  
at Point Lookout, Maryland

Submitted to  
Public Works Department  
Natural and Cultural Resources Division  
Patuxent River Naval Air Station

Report prepared by  
Maryland Historical Trust  
The Southern Maryland Regional Center

Department of Housing and Community Development  
Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum  
10515 Mackall road  
St. Leonard, MD 20685

November 7, 1997

## INTRODUCTION

The Point Lookout survey covered approximately six acres of land located at the eastern tip of the point. The project was undertaken by the Southern Maryland Regional Center at the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, under the direction of Julia A. King, Edward E. Chaney, and Christy E. Leeson. Fieldwork began in February 1995.

Point Lookout is best known as the site of one of the largest camps for Confederate prisoners-of-war during the American Civil War. Another Civil War installation, Hammond General Hospital, was also located at Point Lookout. A lighthouse, constructed in 1830 and in service until 1965, still stands on the Navy-owned portion of Point Lookout, along with two structures associated with a late 19th-century buoy depot. A small structure, believed to have been built as a smokehouse around 1900, stands north of these structures. The Navy donated this building and the yard immediately surrounding it to the State of Maryland during the 1970s.

The purpose of the archaeological investigations was to locate and identify any cultural resources within the project areas. This information is required for resource management and planning purposes by the Navy. Additional excavations were conducted at Point Lookout State Park in order to develop a more complete archaeological context with which to interpret the findings on federal property. No prior systematic terrestrial archaeological investigations had been undertaken on these properties. However, some salvage excavations and preliminary surveys had been done north of the project area in Point Lookout State Park, and an underwater reconnaissance survey of certain areas surrounding Point Lookout was conducted in 1983.

Recent shoreline erosion within the project area has produced additional damage to cultural resources. Nevertheless, documentary evidence indicated that the Point Lookout area had a high potential for the presence of archaeological remains, and therefore a survey was warranted.

Except for the lighthouse, there are no structures dating to the Civil War era still standing at Point Lookout. The only remains from the war that can be seen on the landscape are parts of Fort Lincoln, an earthen fort constructed by Union officers to prevent escapes and external attacks. There is a small structure located north of the lighthouse that is now thought to have been constructed in the late 1800s. It may have functioned originally as a smokehouse, but appears on a 1933 plat as a cornhouse. The smokehouse, and the .058 acre parcel it sits on, was transferred to Point Lookout State Park in 1981, and is now partially accessible to the public.

Because most of the prior archaeological investigations conducted at Point Lookout involved salvage archaeology and limited testing, only glimpses of the archaeological resource base have been revealed. The cultural deposits are poorly understood. By employing a systematic sampling strategy, site boundaries can be defined with some precision. Analysis of artifacts and their distributions can further refine site boundaries, and provide a cultural and temporal framework in which to reconstruct past lifeways. This information can also serve as a valuable tool for managing archaeological resources.

*A total... was*

## PROJECT METHODS

*ft. or feet or 1/2*

### Field Methodology

*was*

The project methodology followed the guidelines of the scope of work prepared by Julia A. King. A total of 385 shovel test pits (STPs) were placed at 25-foot intervals along transects spaced 25 feet apart. All soil excavated from each STP was screened through 1/4" hardware mesh. All artifacts were retained and placed in plastic zipper-lock bags. Sometimes, circumstances prohibited excavating certain STPs into subsoil. Often, the water table was encountered before subsoil was reached. This occurred in the center of the road loop situated in the southern portion of the project area, and to the north along areas adjacent to a tidal marsh.

In STPs located along the Potomac River and Chesapeake shorelines, fill associated with rip-rap construction was usually encountered. Large angular stones were often uncovered, which prohibited excavation into subsoil. In many cases the fill was so deep that further hand excavation was impossible, so a one-inch soil corer was utilized to locate buried deposits or subsoil. Large buried rocks created another untestable zone in the center of the road loop. Fill was probably placed in this low-lying area when the road was constructed.

In addition to STP excavation, 15 test units measuring 5' x 5' were laid in using a transit and hand tapes. An additional 2.5' x 2.5 ft. test unit was also excavated. Excavation of the test units followed natural stratigraphy. Thick strata were subdivided into arbitrary levels. Each strata, level, or feature was assigned a letter designation, which was appended to the unit number. All soil was dry-screened through 1/4" hardware mesh and all artifacts were retained, except in cases where the quantity of certain materials (concrete, coal, and coal slag) necessitated sampling. Sampled materials were counted and weighed, and all but a portion then discarded in the field. All artifacts were placed in zipper-lock bags.

### Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy at Point Lookout is extremely complex, as a result of both human and geologic factors. Generally, the southern portion of the project area contains a dark brown humus layer that is sometimes buried by a thin, fine sand lens. Below the humus layer is a brown to grayish brown medium-grained sand that grades to a pale brown to light yellowish brown fine sand or a pale brown to light yellowish brown coarse sand. In many cases the coarse sand is underlain by pea gravel containing almost no sand. Further north, the soil profile generally consists of a dark brown to black humus layer overlying a dark grayish brown oxidized sand layer or a dark grayish brown sandy or silt loam plowzone. The area where plowzone was discovered is thought to have been the lighthouse keeper's garden. The underlying subsoil consists of a yellowish brown to light yellowish brown silty sandy clay. Fill was encountered along both shorelines. No undisturbed buried strata or subsoils were discovered below the fill in shovel tests within 10 feet of the stone revetment barrier. Fill becomes increasingly more shallow in shovel tests extending landward from the revetment. There are several inland areas where intact layers survive below fill.

## RESULTS

More than 25,000 artifacts were recovered from the 385 shovel test pits excavated. Of these, over 800 can be described as modern recreational refuse. The remaining artifacts were used for distributional analysis.

### Prehistoric Artifacts

Very few prehistoric materials were recovered from the shovel tests. They included three aboriginal pottery sherds and eight pieces of lithic debitage. The presence of so few artifacts supports the idea that, while native populations would have certainly exploited the natural resources at Point Lookout, this would not have been a location selected for permanent or semi-permanent settlement. Permanent occupation apparently did not occur at this portion of Point Lookout until the lighthouse was established in 1830.

### Historic Artifacts

Relatively little domestic material was recovered from the STPs. This was probably due to federal regulations requiring lighthouse keepers to maintain clean yards, and due to the practice of disposing of trash in the nearby waters of the Potomac and Chesapeake Rivers. It was most commonly found in the vicinity of the lighthouse, and included a wide variety of ceramics, table glass, bottle glass, and personal items such as glass buttons and other types of clothing fasteners. A total of 96 ceramics were recovered, dating from as early as the middle 18th century and as late as the early 20th century. Pearlware and whiteware were by far the most frequently recovered types. Pearlware was first introduced in the 1770s and was out of production by the 1830s. Whiteware was first introduced around 1820. Plain whiteware first appeared after 1840, when the demand for transfer-printed designs subsided, and its popularity peaked in the 1870s - 1880s. Other wares included small percentages of creamware, porcelain, Rockingham glazed yellowware, Staffordshire slipware, tin-glazed earthenware, black lead-glazed red coarse earthenware, other lead-glazed earthenwares, stoneware, and ironstone.

*A total was*

An artifact type that created some problems in analysis was a 19th-century composition roofing material. Composition roofing, developed during the middle 19th century, consisted of pieces of cloth felt that were saturated with a tar-like substance (often coal tar), and then nailed to roofing boards. The whole roof was coated with several more layers of tar, then finished off with a coat of sand or gravel. Composition roofing was used to cover the pavilion hospital at Point Lookout. Fragments of it bear a striking resemblance to road paving asphalt, and the two can be easily mistaken. It was not until the material was recovered from undisturbed 19th-century contexts in test units that we correctly identified it as composition roofing. This material has not been reported from any of the previous archaeological investigations at Point Lookout. Given the difficulty in distinguishing composition roofing from modern road asphalt when seen out of its 19th-century context, it may be that this material has simply not been recognized by previous investigators at Point Lookout.

Three test units -- 11136, 11743, and 11747 -- were excavated in close proximity to the

lighthouse. They were placed to recover subsurface architectural data, such as builder's trenches and destruction levels, which could be used to view modifications to the structure over time.

Three test units -- 19930, 21121, and 21321 -- were excavated in an area that had high concentrations of composition roofing material, brick, nails, 19th and 20th-century window glass, and 19th-century ceramics.

Test unit 25101 was opened to explore an intact brick feature discovered in shovel test pit N825/E300. Three additional test units -- 25100, 25301, and 25502 -- were opened to further define the features that were uncovered in 25101. These units lie in an area believed to be the lighthouse keeper's garden, because of the presence of a plowzone.

Heavy concentrations of nails and composition roofing material, and a smaller concentration of 19th-century bottle glass recovered in STPs determined the placement of test units 27100 and 27886. Test unit 27100 contained topsoil, a transitional layer, then subsoil. No features were encountered. In test unit 27886, various non-cultural deposits were encountered, including a series of amorphous alluvial or aeolian deposits.

Test Unit 29910 contained no cultural features. Test unit 29916 revealed two post holes and molds and plowscars.

Two test units contained fill layers overlying intact stratigraphy: 32904 and 34100. Test unit 32904 contained a topsoil above fill. The fill was followed by a buried topsoil layer. Below this buried topsoil was a utility trench. No other cultural deposits were encountered. Test unit 34100 revealed several fill layers above a buried humus. The soil below the buried humus was characterized by destruction layers associated with the dismantling of the hospital.

## MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations relate to the archaeological resources located at Point Lookout. For recommendations concerning remaining architectural resources, consult *Point Lookout Light Station Point Lookout, Maryland Architectural and Historical Documentation Project* by Steven Moffson and Janet Friedman, 1995. As visible in the attached figure, the Civil War hospital has largely disappeared into the Chesapeake Bay. This is due to the natural erosional processes which have plagued the Bay for the past 12,000 years. Nevertheless, archaeological traces of several of the western hospital wards and outbuildings are still present at Point Lookout. Because substantial shoreline erosion has resulted in considerable damage to cultural resources, efforts should be made to prevent or reduce future erosion. All disturbed areas (shown on the figure) do not require any further archaeological work.

At the northern end of the property, within state jurisdiction, the remains of portions of the Civil War occupation exist. Portions of a couple of hospital wards and other outbuildings also exist on Navy property (see figure). STPs and test unit excavation revealed nineteenth-century architectural materials including cut nails and composition roofing material. Nineteenth-century ceramics and Civil War era bullets, including one carved into a chess piece, were also clustered in this vicinity, and their association corresponds to the known historical use of the property. Intact cultural features, including at least one post hole, and intact stratigraphy characterize the soils in this area. This area is potentially significant due to the presence of intact stratigraphy and

clustered nineteenth-century material. In addition, the threat posed to this area due to natural erosional processes makes further archaeological investigations appropriate, if not imperative.

The area surrounding the lighthouse is significant because numerous buried deposits and features exist which are potentially significant (see attached figure). The area south of the lighthouse has been archaeologically compromised due to subsequent construction episodes and the presence of buildings. These nineteenth-century structures have not been extensively modified. The buildings themselves may be architecturally significant, and that assessment should be present in the 1995 Dames and Moore survey (Moffson and Friedman). Should ground disturbing activities be required in this area, additional archaeological investigations are recommended. The area south of the buoy sheds does not require further archaeology because of disturbance. The area east of the buoy sheds can also be written off as not significant, and requires no further archaeological work.